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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a structured framework for the transition of students with disabilities from middle or junior high school to high school. First, it outlines a transition decision tree to help decide whether a formal transition plan is needed. Next, the paper offers a 10-step set of practices appropriate for all students with disabilities in the last year of middle/junior high school. Steps include gathering and compiling relevant information into a student portfolio; determining the student's attitudes, preferences, concerns, and interests about high school; selecting high school courses and activities; and planning and conducting an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting. Suggestions for refocusing middle/junior high school curriculum to facilitate transition include assessing available course offerings that match IEP goals and other transitional curriculum areas, assessing the gaps between what is being taught and what the student needs, and developing resources and strategies for bridging the gaps. Appropriate curriculum practices are suggested in the areas of vocational training/pre-employment, personal management and independent living, community participation, recreation and leisure, and preparation for continued education/training. Critical skills for college bound junior high/middle school students with learning disabilities are listed as are quality indicators of effective instruction for a functional curriculum. (DB)

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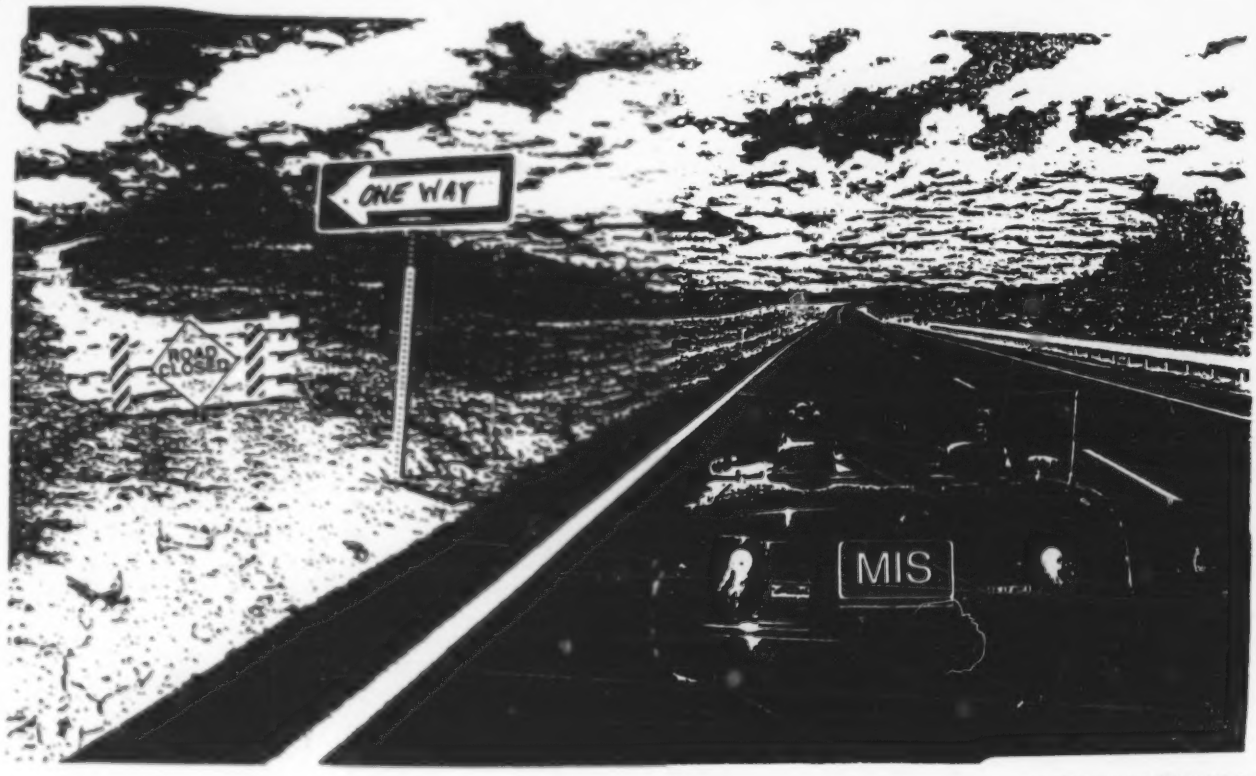
THE FAST LANE TO HIGH SCHOOL

Transition from Middle School/Junior High to High School



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Transition from Middle/Junior High School to High School

by Peggy Milligan, M.Ed.

Little is written about transition from middle school/junior high school to high school; however, this transition may be equally important to transition from school to adult life. Many students feel the increasing pressures of the adult world as they enter high school. Competing academically or on equal footing with their peers is sometimes difficult because of a particular disability. Keeping up with their studies becomes increasingly difficult because of mental blocks, the assortment of subjects they deal with, the quantity and diversity of work, and the pressures that come with being a teenager (Hilts-Scott, S., Parent Information Networking Specialist, Southern Arizona, 1994). In addition some adolescents may believe they can not meet graduation requirements, may feel the school curricula does not meets their needs, and they may not be encouraged by their schools or anyone else to stay (SRI, 1989). For too many of our eighth and ninth grade students the answer has been to stop trying and to dropout of school and never receive the benefits of transition planning at the high school level.

Parents have concerns too. As a student with special education needs prepares to exit the middle/junior high school, anxiety of most parents increases. Fear of the unknown fosters this anxiety. How will a child react to a totally new environment, relate to more teachers and peers, handle the expectations of increased independence, and prepare for the adult world?

Middle/junior high school is an important time to consider whether to begin **formal** transition planning. The following decision tree may be useful in making that determination. If formal planning is appropriate, initiate transition planning according to your state's Special Education Rules and the IDEA (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 1990).

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TRANSITION DECISION TREE

Is the student

- at risk of dropping out?
- in need of more than 2 years of transition services?
- less motivated than other students?
- classified with having a severe disability?
- taking longer to learn?
- generalizing less or slower?
- of the opinion that education has little to offer?

If yes,

V

Student needs formal transition plan.

If no,

Wait until age 16 to begin formal transition planning

V

Exit

Whether or not a student has a formal transition plan, transition from middle school/junior high school to high school is an important time for educators and other service providers to help students onto a positive path into adulthood. Effective planning to high school can help students avoid failure in school, provide a bridge of support, and increase the likelihood that they finish school. The following checklist for transition to high school is appropriate practices for all students with disabilities in the last year of middle school/junior high school.

TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL CHECKLIST

Student _____ Date_____

STEP	ACTION	✔	COMMENTS
I	Relevant information is gathered about - receiving high school - student information - transition portfolio is complete		
II	Orientation, tours, visits, and introductions are made.		
III	Student attitude, preferences, concerns, and interests about high school are determined.		
IV	Student needs, training, and activities are determined based on input from student, family, teachers and appropriate others in the following transition areas. (Formal Transition Planning must begin by the age 16 for all students.) -instruction -community experiences -social relationships -independent living -development of employment skills -recreation/leisure		
V	Courses are selected that match student needs.		
VI	Specific skills for success in classes and other desired environments (ability vs demands) are identified. Preferred learning style, compensatory strategies are documented.		
VII	Level and type of support is determined in special ed, general ed, and applied tech ed. Consider -high school advocate/peer -peer mediation/tutor -other		
VIII	IEP meeting conducted using information from Steps I-VII with representatives from receiving high school. Student planned and conducted as much of meeting as possible.		
IX	Transition to high school plans are made. Transition portfolio submitted. Agreements regarding supports, responsibilities, and time lines are made.		
X	Follow up and follow along procedures are in place to ensure student goes to high school and is systematically monitored weekly then quarterly.		

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Transition to High School - Checklist Elaboration

The following approach is appropriate practice for all students with disabilities in the last year of middle/junior high school.

STEP I Gather and compile relevant information into a student portfolio

Compile information about the receiving high school (the receiving high school is determine by home and school boundaries)

- ✓ physical characteristics
- ✓ high school curriculum including general education, applied technology education, and special education support options
- ✓ instructional activities and community experience options
- ✓ student/peer support options
- ✓ school activities available (both during school and after school)

Gather student information

- ✓ individual identifying information
- ✓ medical and related information
- ✓ student preference information
- ✓ behavioral and social performance
- ✓ family information
- ✓ intellectual and education information
- ✓ functional performance assessments
- ✓ communication information
- ✓ members of current peer group/friends going to same high school
- ✓ other relevant information

STEP II Arrange and conduct student activities with receiving high school including

- ✓ orientations
- ✓ building torus
- ✓ tour and gather information about applied technology and other vocational training options
- ✓ informal activities with students at high school (high profile students provide a positive first impression and high expectations)
- ✓ club and athletic options
- ✓ meet regular education and special education faculty, staff, and other appropriate school personnel

STEP III Conduct activities to determine the student's attitude, preferences concerns, and interests about high school. Activities may include informal discussions, student questionnaires and interviews, and class projects.

STEP IV Determine desired high school involvement and skills needed to succeed. Get input from student, family, teachers, and appropriate others in instruction, community experiences, social relationships, personal management/independent living skills, development of employment skills and recreation/leisure through futures planning activities.

STEP V Select high school courses and activities. Consider student's preferences and interests.

STEP VI Identify specific skills needed in classes and other environments. Determine difference between ability and demands of high school through a discrepancy analysis.

Document student's preferred learning style, compensatory strategies, alternative performance strategies, study skill needs, adaptations and modifications. Address these issues in the IEP (Individualized Education Program).

STEP VII Determine level and type of student support needed at receiving high school including special education, general ed, applied technology ed. Consider high school student mentor or advocate, peer mediation or tutor, and other individualized options.

STEP VIII Plan and conduct IEP meeting

Teach and Assist student in planning and conducting as much of the IEP meeting as possible.

Invite required and other appropriate participants. Consider

- ✓ student
- ✓ parents
- ✓ applied technology and general educators
- ✓ peers
- ✓ community service agency representatives
- ✓ student support advocate from high school
- ✓ others determined appropriate

STEP XI Complete "Transition to High School Checklist. Include in student's portfolio.

STEP X Follow along and follow up

Insure linkages with receiving high school are in place including

- ✓ linkages with age peers
- ✓ teachers
- ✓ administrators
- ✓ parents/ family

Be certain the student **goes** to high school

Monitor weekly then quarterly

MIDDLE SCHOOL/JUNIOR HIGH

CURRICULUM

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Middle/Junior High School Curriculum

In middle school/junior high school teachers and parents may experience increased anxiety about academics, specifically reading and math. Certainly the inability to read or to do simple mathematics is an issue; however, by the time a student reaches middle school/junior high school, it is time to address compensatory strategies, alternative and performance skills, and other methods of learning specific to an individual student. Some examples include a functional academic curricula which teaches specific academics brought in from the community to the classroom, community validation of academic skills taught in classrooms, demonstration of social skills in natural school, work, and social environments (rather than in pull out settings), and assessment of critical skills needed in the next learning environment, including study skills, self management skills, organizational skills, workplace skills, and others.

The IDEA encourages transition planning for students at age 14 or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP team however school personnel would be remiss not to recognize the "whole life" needs of students and not to begin early in preparation for their projected post school environments. It is no longer acceptable to consider the sole outcome of education simply a graduation diploma or certificate. Educators must look beyond the diploma to post-school outcomes for the individual in the areas of employment, living arrangements, community participation, recreation and leisure, and post-secondary education and/or training. This means educators must refocus curricula toward these outcomes and shift the focus of what, where, and how they teach.

Few teachers provide their students with the opportunity to learn functional life skills and validate them in real life environments or to learn basic employment vocabulary or to view different occupations at work on a consistent basis (Clark, 1979). These opportunities and other community-referenced activities are basic to education and should be provided to all students receiving special education services. In order to give students with disabilities opportunities to succeed upon leaving the school system and include the generalization of skills learned in school in integrated community settings, it is imperative that training in vocational skills be provided at an early age. Research has suggested that when this training in provided exclusively to older students, the outcomes are dismal (Hasazi et al., 1985; Mithaug et al., 1985).

The following basic assumptions underlie the decisions facing parents or guardians and middle school educators in thinking about the important life-centered outcomes that schools should address:

1. The transition needs of students with disabilities may differ significantly enough early on from those students without disabilities that special attention must be given to curriculum alternatives and accommodations.

2. The transition needs of individual students with disabilities vary significantly across types of disabilities, levels of severity, age or maturity levels, age at onset, cultural backgrounds, and the nature of family and community support. This means that there must be flexibility and alternatives in the curriculum.

3. Systematic planning and programming for a seamless transition process should begin early. Middle school/junior high schools play a key role in the transition process.

4. The concept of "appropriate education' opens the doors to a philosophy that supports the notion that all children do not have to be in the same curriculum. the concept of "least restrictive environment" as well as the concept of inclusion in the neighborhood school presses the notion that children may not need to be segregated to provide an appropriate curriculum.

Refocusing Curriculum

There are several steps for a middle school/junior high school to follow in a refocusing process.

Step 1 Assess what is currently available in general education course offerings and class content that match IEP goals and what is being taught that address the areas of :

. Employment that develop job seeking/keeping skills
. Independent living
. Community participation
. Recreation and leisure
. Preparation for continued education/training

Step 2 The second step is to identify the gaps between what is being taught and what the student needs.

Step 3 The third step is to develop resources and strategies for bridging the gaps. Suggested ways to bridge the gaps may include but are not limited to:

. Select textbooks that include life skills issues and applications
. Infuse transition-related instruction into classes through activities and materials
. Develop collaborative planning and instructional activities between general and special education teachers
. modify and adapt existing curricula to meet students needs and individual student's learning style
. Modify and adapt instructional and assessment methods to permit students with disabilities to acquire instructional content and demonstrate acquisition in ways that satisfy transition-related IEP goals and objectives

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- Imbed opportunities for decision-making, problem solving, and self-determination into all instructional activities
- Identify amount of support needed
- Embed behavior management and social skills into all activities
- Use flexible scheduling or creative collaboration among teachers to allow time for community-based instruction
- Create a class addressing transition

DOING IT DIFFERENTLY - - NOT DOING MORE

Refocusing curricula will require doing things DIFFERENTLY - - NOT DOING MORE. Through systematic instruction, creative scheduling and program design, school personnel can meet the challenges and opportunities to increase the likelihood that students finish school with better transition outcomes when they are out of school. Below are appropriate practices that illustrate a refocused curricula.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING/PRE-EMPLOYMENT: The curricula for secondary students with disabilities must include competencies in pre-employment, job seeking, job keeping, work maturity skills with community experiences and appropriate Applied Technology Education courses. They are essential for successful transition to the world of work.

Activities to assist students in making future vocational training and career plans include

- Applied Technology Education courses
- Community job site visits
- School-based job experiences
- Community work site representatives visit classroom
- Home chores
- Work skills, values and work place social skills training

Appropriate assessment & evaluations during middle/junior high schools include interest inventories, situational assessments, and job evaluations and reports compiled into a student's employment portfolio. A portfolio can act as a running resume' through middle school/junior high and through high school.

Employment preparation experiences, whether in school or in a community setting, should promote independence, on task behaviors, respect for others and property, develop work values and job skills, and should assist in the identification of vocational strengths, interests, work styles, and the level of support needed.

Home goals are another important aspect in the preparation of students for work through home chores, volunteer work, and supervised neighborhood jobs help to develop a students self confidence and work habits, builds self esteem. promotes helpfulness, and discourages boredom. Sample home chores include home maintenance indoors and outdoors, animal care, yard care, vehicle maintenance, cleaning, food preparation and storage, and others.

PERSONAL MANAGEMENT/INDEPENDENT LIVING: To establish and increase the level of personal independence at home, in school, and in the student's community in the following learning areas

- money management including savings, earnings, spending, budgeting
- management of personal space and belongings
- food preparation and management
- health and safety
- self-care/self-determination/self-advocacy
- social skills/communication/relationships
- assistive technology

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: Awareness of and access to community services and supports including

- mobility and transportation
- access to support and service agencies
- community emergency locations etc.

RECREATION AND LEISURE: Defined as activities an individual engages in after work or school. The purpose of addressing recreation and leisure in the IEP process is to provide options of activities address quality of life issues for an individual at home, in school, and in the community including

- school activities
- after school activities and events
- elective classes at school
- community sports leagues, clubs and youth groups
- family activities and events
- hobbies, games, and crafts

PREPARATION FOR CONTINUED EDUCATION/TRAINING: Students must develop certain competencies in order to succeed in educational settings at secondary, and post school levels. Mastery of transition focused competencies will improve the chances of a student's smooth transition from school to school and from school to post secondary placements. It is also important to determine key linkages for each environment to facilitate the transition process.

The following list of skills was developed by the University of Utah Disabled Student Center to identify some critical skills students with learning problems need to develop in junior high/middle school to succeed in educational settings at the high school level.

Critical Skills for College Bound Junior High/Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities

- basic skills development
- develop/remediate skills within regular curriculum
- skill concentration on effective learning strategies
- develop compensatory strategies
- mainstream content instruction with special ed support
- team decision making regarding courses/instructors
- use 9th grade classes for graduation requirements
- study skills/self management
- emphasize oral skills development
- advanced social skills/ role playing/discussion (peer relations, reading environment, body language, grooming)
- teacher pleasing
- understanding/explaining
- personal learning style
- self advocacy
- participating in school activities
- participation in organized activities/groups
- build on hobbies, new interests, academic strengths
- career/vocational
- career orientation/exploration
- pre-vocational skill development
- summer/weekend work or experience

Functional Curricula: Defined as the application of academic skill to important life activities. The purpose of a functional curricula is to assess, teach, and validate academic skill in natural learning environments appropriate to the desired future outcomes of education for an individual student.

Below are quality indicators of effective instruction for a functional a curricula.

- ☞ Focuses on needed post school competencies
- ☞ Is based on futures planning and functional skills assessments
- ☞ Includes systematic instruction and evaluation
- ☞ Is responsive to a student's learning style, compensatory strategy needs, alternative performance needs, assistive technology needs, and peer support needs
- ☞ Validates competencies in community and other natural environments
- ☞ Shows evidence of modified and/or adaptive learning materials and at the same time maintain peer referenced integrity
- ☞ Groups students heterogeneously
- ☞ Supports teachers and trainers through effective collaboration
- ☞ Demonstrates effective classroom management strategies including; schedules, staff meetings, staff performance evaluations, problem solving techniques, and high percent of instructional time
- ☞ Maintenance of appropriate logs, including; home contact logs, employer contact logs, regular ed and applied technology teacher contact logs, and others as deemed necessary
- ☞ Addresses maladaptive behavior systematically
- ☞ Delivery or teacher instruction is consistent with effective teaching standards.

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